Taymiyyan *Taṣawwuf* meets Ottoman Orthodoxy: Reformed Sufism in the thought of Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī

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Introduction

Shaykh al-Islām Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) is undoubtedly one of the most widely cited of the classical Islamic thinkers in present-day Muslim discourse. Unfortunately, however, it is more common to find his name and thought invoked in the unsavory context of radical Islam than in the contexts of sophisticated theological, juridical or even philosophical debates related to Islam and Islamic thought. His name and legacy, it is fair to say, has in many ways been tarnished, as has been highlighted recently by the Western world's leading expert on Taymiyyan thought, Yahya Michot: 'Whether coming from government circles or militant Islamists, from incompetent Orientalists or the Western media, a plethora of writings accuse the Mamlūk theologian and mufti of opposition to reason and mysticism, of fundamentalism and intolerance, of radical extremism.'[2]

While Ibn Taymiyya's influence has probably been exaggerated with respect to modern Islamic militancy, his influence has been significantly under-estimated in respect of early modern Islamic revivalism and reform. Khaled El-Rouayheb's study on the reception of Ibn Taymiyya in later Muslim thought, in which he argues that Ibn Taymiyya's current reputation and influence should not obscure his pre-modern notoriety and marginality, is a case in point. After examining the curricula studied at the major centres of learning in the Ottoman world, El-Rouayheb reaches the conclusion that Ibn Taymiyya's writings were rarely read or studied, and that, while some 17th and 18th century authors such as the Indian reformer Shāh Waliullāh al-Dihlawī (d. 1762) express admiration for Ibn Taymiyya, very few outside the Wahhābī movement embraced the Taymiyyan outlook as a whole. Aware of links made between the 17th century Ottoman Qāḍīzādelis[3] and Ibn Taymiyya, yet dismissive of them, El-Rouayheb

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[2] Y. Michot, *Ibn Taymiyya against Extremisms* (Beirut: Dar Albouraq, 2012), XX.

[3] The Qāḍīzādelis were a movement of puritanical reformers and activists that emerged in 17th century Ottoman Turkey. Drawn from a spectrum of backgrounds, but bound together by a unified vision for Ottoman society,

speculatively suggests that the views of reformers such as Birgili Meḥmed Efendi (d. 981/1573) should be sought in “intolerant currents within the Hanafi-Maturidi school”, whose representatives include scholars such as ^{c}Alā’ al-Dīn al-Bukhārī (d. 1438).[4] El-Rouayheb is hardly the first to express a dismissive view of Ibn Taymiyya’s influence in early modern Islam; Bernd Radtke before him also denied any linkage between Ibn Taymiyya and early modern reform, in this case in specific connection with Birgili Meḥmed.[5] It was therefore with no small degree of excitement that a few years ago I received a text of an Ottoman scholar of the 17th century, Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī (d. 1041/1631 or 1043/1634),[6] from my then supervisor Prof. Y. Michot, who had already been able to discern a Taymiyyan scent within the text. The full title of the text already speaks volumes: *Majālis al-Abrār wa-Masālik al-Akhyār wa-Maḥāyiq al-Bida^{c} wa-Maqāmi^{c} al-Ashrār* (*The Assemblies of the Pious and the Paths of the Excellent, The Obliteration of Innovations and the Curbing of the Wicked*),[7] and the list of religious questions broached in this rich piece is suggestive of even more.[8] We soon discovered that the *Majālis* was a veritable manifesto for religious reform, deploying Hadith collected in

these puritans were able to maneuver themselves into hugely significant positions of influence such that, by the reign of Sultan Murād IV (r. 1032/1623-1049/1640), they had a virtual monopoly over the pulpits of Istanbul’s imperial mosques. Engaging in a campaign to claim back Islam from “corrupt scholars” and “heterodox Sufis”, the Qāḍīzādelis promulgated a return to the way of the *Salaf* (the early generations of Muslims), a new vision for the spiritual path and a form of violent activism which had not been seen in Ottoman lands before their time. The most significant dedicated studies on the movement, in chronological order, are: N. Öztürk, ‘Islamic Orthodoxy among the Ottomans in the Seventeenth Century with Special Reference to the Qadi-zade Movement’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1981); Ş. Çavuşoğlu, ‘The Kadizadeli Movement: An Attempt of Şeri’at-Minded Reform in the Ottoman Empire’ (unpublished PhD thesis, Princeton University, 1990); M. Zilfi, *Politics of Piety: The Ottoman Ulema in the Post-Classical Age (1600-1800)* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica [Studies in Middle-Eastern History, 8] 1988); M. Zilfi, ‘The Kadizadelis: Discordant Revivalism in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul,’ *Journal of Near Eastern Studies,* 45 (1986), pp. 256-257); M. Sheikh, *Ottoman Puritanism and Its Discontents: Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī and the Qāḍīzādelis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 10-39.

[4] K. El-Rouayheb, ‘From Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 1566) to Khayr al-Dīn al-Ālūsī (d. 1899): Changing Views of Ibn Taymiyya among non-Ḥanbalī Sunni Scholars’, in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times,* eds. Y. Rapoport and S. Ahmed (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 304.

[5] B. Radtke, ‘Birgiwîs *Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*. Einige Bemerkungen und Überlegungen’, *Journal of Turkish Studies*, 26 (2002), 159-174, 172.

[6] We know very little about al-Āqḥiṣārī beyond his intellectual legacy. Born in Cyprus to a Christian family, he was taken away as a child after the Ottoman conquest of the island between 977/1570 and 981/1573 and converted to Islam. Initially sent to join the Devşirme for a religious education, he eventually went on to become a Ḥanafī scholar of some stature, gifted in Arabic as well as Ottoman Turkish. Al-Āqḥiṣārī probably spent most of the remainder of his life in Akhisar, Western Anatolia. For more on his biography, see Y. Michot, *Against Smoking: An Ottoman Manifesto.* An introduction, edition and translation of Aḥmad Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī’s *al-Risāla al-Dukhāniyya* (Leicester: Kube Publishing, 2010), 1-3. On his association with the Qāḍīzādelis, see M. Sheikh, *Ottoman Puritanism and Its Discontents*.

[7] Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī, *Majālis al-Abrār,* MS. Michot [redacted]2. This particular manuscript is one of the only complete extant copies that we possess. For more on the manuscript, see Y. Michot, *L’opium et le cafe* (Paris-Beirut: Albouraq, 2008), 56-58.

[8] For the contents of the *Majālis* see Y. Michot, *Against Smoking*, 11-12.

the *Maṣābīḥ al-sunna* of Abū Muḥammad Ḥuṣayn b. Mas[c]ūd al-Baghawī (d. 515/1122)[9] to undertake a social critique of Ottoman society. The understanding of orthodoxy and orthopraxy one confronts is clearly aligned with the views of better-known revivalists of the time such as Birgili and Qāḍīzāde Meḥmed Efendī (d. 1044/1635), the eponymous founder of the 17th century Ottoman puritanical movement. Perhaps most significantly, the establishing of a link between the *Majālis* and Ibn Taymiyya's anti-*bid[c]a* tome, *Iqtid*ā᾽ *al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*, finally put to rest the vexed question concerning Ibn Taymiyya's influence both in early modern Islam and outwith Wahhābī revivalism.[10]

Yet, there is much more to say about Taymiyyan influence within Qāḍīzādeli revivalism than merely the problematization of *bid[c]a*; perhaps more significantly, and certainly more curiously, the mark of Taymiyyan Sufism[11] is also palpable, albeit in a subtler manifestation.[12] The main purpose of this paper is to bring this very fact to light, taking as its

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9 Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn b. Mas[c]ūd b. Muḥammad al-Baghawī, Shāfi[c]ī jurist and prolific compiler of Hadith. He is most famous for his *Sharḥ al-Sunna* and *Maṣābīḥ al-Sunna*, the latter of which gained widespread esteem in the Muslim world and secured its place on Ḥanafī curricula from the Ottoman Empire to the Indian Subcontinent. The utility of *Māṣābīḥ al-Sunna* for reformers such as al-Āqḥiṣārī is not difficult to discern: al-Baghawī culled Hadith from the *Ṣiḥāḥ*, removed the *isnād*s, and thereby produced a text that would meet the needs of teachers and preachers seeking to instill the Prophet's Sunna in the daily lives of people. It was a text that was virtually tailor made for puritans such as al-Āqḥiṣārī. For al-Baghawī's biography, see E. Dickinson, art. "Baghawī", *EI3* (last access 29 January 2017). On the formation and function of the *Maṣābīḥ al-Sunna*, see J. Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Ḥadīth Canon* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 246-247.

10 See M. Sheikh, 'Taymiyyan Influences in an Ottoman-Ḥanafī Milieu: The Case of Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī,' in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 25/1, 2015, 1-20.

11 The debate on whether Ibn Taymiyya was a Sufi in the conventional sense of having a tariqah affiliation is still unresolved. George Makdisi's controversial study linking Ibn Taymiyya to the Qādiri Order based on documentary evidence continues to be divisive, with a number of scholars, including the present author, in doubt about the credibility of any link of this kind which is unsubstantiated in the writings of Ibn Taymiyya himself. For more on G. Makdisi's evidence, see "Ibn Taymīya: A Sufi of the Qādiriya Order", *The American Journal of Arabic Studies*, 1 (1973), 118-129. Ovamir Anjum summarises the debate engendered by Makdisi's study in "Sufism without Mysticism? Ibn Qayyim al-Ǧawziyyah's Objectives in Madāriǧ al-Sālikīn", C. Bori and L. Holtzman (eds.), *A Scholar in the Shadow: Essays in the Legal and Theological Thought of Ibn Qayyim al-Ǧawziyyah*, *Oriente Moderno*, n.s 90/1 (2010), 155-182, 156-157. That he was a Sufi in a broader sense is beyond doubt: Ibn Taymiyya's writings on Sufism in the *Majmū' al-fatāwa*, especially in *Kitāb al-Sulūk* and *Kitāb al-Taṣawwuf*, point to out the place he saw for Sufism in Islam. His frequent condemnations of the *mutaṣawwifa*, so-called "fake Sufis", throughout these two "books" and elsewhere, suggest that he considered himself a propagator of true Sufism. For more on the Sufism of Ibn Taymiyya, see Arjan Post, "A Glimpse of Sufism from the Circle of Ibn Taymiyya: *An Edition and Translation of al-Ba'labaki's (d. 734/1333) Epistle on the Spiritual Way (Risalat al-Suluk)*", *Journal of Sufi Studies*, 5 (2016), 156-187; and Diego R. Sarro, "Spiritual anti-elitism: Ibn Taymiyya's doctrine of sainthood (*walaya*)", *Islam and Christian Muslim Relations*, 3 (2011), 275-291.

12 A note on the use of the term "Taymiyyan" in the context of this article: I use it denote, beyond the immediate concepts, ideas and thought of Ibn Taymiyya, also the concepts, ideas and thought of Ibn al-Qayyim. "Taymiyyan" for the purposes of this article, therefore, also subsumes the Jawziyyan. I maintain this elision despite the growing recognition that Ibn al-Qayyim was more than simply a loyal and imitating disciple. As far as *taṣawwuf*, it is not

focus two relevant texts of the Qāḍīzādeli scholar Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī: *Majālis al-Abrār* and *Risāla fī ʾl-Sulūk*[13]. In both, al-Āqḥiṣārī has a considerable amount to say about Sufism, yet locating him within the broader Muslim spiritual tradition is no straightforward task since he never explicitly links his ideas to any of the existing Ottoman Sufi orders. A close reading of his writings on Sufism is therefore in order to elicit the constituent elements of his system. Doing so will reveal that al-Āqḥiṣārī drew in no small part from a spiritual order which had firm roots in modern Turkey—the Naqshbandiyya; but it also reveals, fundamentally, the identifiable influence of Ḥanbalī Sufism in the form of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) on the spiritual outlook of this Ottoman puritan. How are these two distinct and arguably conflicting influences which are exhibited in a single system to be understood? Providing an answer to this is another key aim of this paper, and will contribute ultimately to the most coherent picture yet of Qāḍīzādeli Sufism.

The paper is divided into three parts: the first focuses on the autochthonous Naqshbandī influence on al-Āqḥiṣārī's system; the second sets out the influence of Ḥanbalī Sufism, which presents itself more as critique than a vision; the final part attempts a reconciliation of the tension which the two influences produce.

Naqshbandī Allignments

The first time a link between the Qāḍīzādelis and Ottoman Naqshbandīs is made in the literature occurs in Dina Le Gall's study of pre-Mujaddidī Naqshbandīs in the Ottoman Empire. Le Gall reveals the case of Osman Bosnevī, a Naqshbandī shaykh who became a close companion of the later leader of the Qāḍīzādelis, Meḥmed Üṣṭüwānī (d. 1072/1661). She notes the role of Bosnevī in the "Qāḍīzādeli affair", which she infers from Nāᶜīmā's *Tārīh*. In this work, Bosnevī is described as 'teacher of the pages in the Palace [and] preacher of the Süleymāniye [Mosque]'.[14] The same link is tentatively seconded by Itzchak Weismann in his monograph on the Naqshbandī Order. Arguing in support of the possibility that the influence of the Naqshbandī Order on the formation of modern Islamic revivalist trends precedes the 18th

so clear the extent to which Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya departed from Ibn Taymiyya's understanding of the spiritual path, the subsumption of the Jawziyyan within the Taymiyyan for the purposes of this paper. For more on Ibn al-Qayyim's specific contributions, see the volume edited by C. Bori and L. Holtzman, *A Scholar in the Shadow.*

[13] *Risāla fī ʾl-Sulūk wa-anna-hū lā budda liʾl-Sālik min Murshid*, MS. Harput 429, fols. 73r-78v. For more on this text, see M. Sheikh, *Ottoman Puritanism and Its Discontents*, 83.

[14] D. Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandīs in the Ottoman world, 1450-1700* (Albany: Suny Press, 2006), 152. Since the *nisba* 'Bosnevī' is not mentioned in Nāᶜīmā's history, Le Gall supports this identification on the basis of another account documented by Uşakīzāde in *Zeyl-i shaqā'iq.* Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism*, p. 152.

century, to the second half of the sixteenth century in Ottoman Turkey, Weismann highlights the "project of Birgili" as an early expression of this tendency, especially in the idea of the "muḥammadan way", *al-tarīqat al-muḥammadiyya*, a vision of the spiritual path which places primacy on the Sunna of the Prophet Muḥammad.[15] We are told about Birgili's close connections with the Amir-i Bukhari lodge, the principal Naqshbandī institution in Istanbul, as well as Birgili's admission into the ranks of the scholarly estate by virtue of the patronage of the brother-in-law and disciple of a certain Naqshbandī shaykh, Abdüllatif.[16] Finally, Weismann describes how Birgili's teachings were taken up by several leading Naqshbandis of Istanbul, including Mehmed Ma[c]rūf Trabzūnī (d. 1002/1594), translator of Kāshifī's *Rashaḥāt [c]ayn al-ḥaya* (*Beads of Dew from the Source of Life*) into Turkish, and Ahmed Tirevī (d. after 1029/1620), head of the Hekim Çelebī lodge.[17] Given this context, it is therefore unsurprising that Qāḍīzādeli proximity with Naqshbandīs might also extend to the former borrowing from this well-entrenched and fiercely conservative spiritual order.[18]

Dhikr

Aḥmad al-Āqḥiṣārī understands the mystical path to be a central element in the life of a believer. In fact, the very first *ḥadīth* in *Majālis al-abrār,* which he lifts from the *Maṣābīh al-Sunna*, is one which underscores the importance of spiritual wayfaring, and specifically the practice of *dhikr*, or remembering God. The opening passages of his commentary betray the extent to which spirituality infuses al-Āqḥiṣārī's religious vision. He appears both prescriptive and critical, and his positions on a series of practices which were commonplace in the Sufi tradition are striking. *Majlis I* commences with a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet likened the one who is constant in *dhikr* as a living person and the one who does not engage in *dhikr* as a dead person.[19] After a cursory examination of this tradition, al-Āqḥiṣārī presents a detailed

[15] I. Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2007), 134.
[16] Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, 134.
[17] Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, 134.
[18] Describing the position that the order managed to secure for itself following its first introduction into Ottoman lands in the 15th century, Hamid Algar says: "The order has played a role of cardinal importance in the spiritual and religious life of the Turkish people. Sober and rigorous, devoted to the cultivation of God's Law and the exemplary model of the Companions, it was above all the order of the ulama: countless members of the learned institution gave it their allegiance. But men from all classes and professions have been affiliated to it, and its influence has extended beyond the major cities into provincial towns and villages as well. It can be said that after Transoxiana, Turkey became the second major center of the Naqshbandiya." H. Algar, "The Naqshbandi Order: A Preliminary Survey of Its History and Significance", *Studia Islamica*, 44 (1976), 140-141.
[19] *Majālis al-Abrār,* f. 3r. For a full translation of the *ḥadīth,* see *Ottoman Puritanism and Its Discontents*, 67.

dissection in which he discusses it in relation to issues of his age. Of relevance here is the description of how *dhikr* should be performed, the prerequisites of *dhikr* and the fruits of sustained meditation:

And the best remembrance (*dhikr*), according to that which has been reported in this *ḥadīth*, is [the formula], 'There is no god but God (*lā ilāha illa ʾllāh*)'. It is necessary that the worshipper who is *compos mentis* (*mukallaf*) occupies himself with this formula so that his heart finds contentment (*yaṭmaʾinna qalbu-hu*) and so that he might prepare himself for [receiving] knowledge (*maᶜrifa*) of God, the Exalted.[20]

Here al-Āqḥiṣārī presents the corner-stone of Sufi epistemology—the nexus between *dhikr* and gnosis (*maᶜrifa*), the latter of which is a central pursuit of the mystical path. Here is also the tacit acknowledgment of the superiority of the inner (*bāṭin*) over the outer *ẓāhir*)—or the spiritual over the profane. Regarding the modality of *dhikr*, al-Āqḥiṣārī says:

The remembrance (*dhikr*) of God is the pre-eminent demand (*al-maṭlūb al-aᶜlā*) and the furthest objective (*al-maqṣūd al-aqṣā*). It is of two types: the first is *dhikr* with the tongue and the other is *dhikr* with the heart. *Dhikr* with the tongue is that which is uttered on the tongue and heard by the ears; it consists of sounds and letters. As for *dhikr* with the heart, it is neither uttered on the tongue nor heard by the ears; rather, it is the contemplation and observance of the heart; it is the highest ranking [form of] *dhikr* and it is certain that this [is the form of *dhikr*] intended by here, i.e. the contemplative, internalized *dhikr*. This is since this is the [form] which has additional excellence over and above expending wealth and self, as has come in the report: 'An hour's contemplation is better than seventy years of worship.' This is not achieved except by the servant's persistence in *dhikr* with the tongue together with a presence of heart until the point at which the *dhikr* becomes firmly embedded in his heart and takes control of him in such a manner that, were he to shift his attention away from it, it would be a burden for him, just as at the beginning [of his spiritual quest] it was a burden for him to become constant in doing it.[21]

[20] *Majālis al-Abrār*, f. 3r.
[21] *Majālis al-Abrār*, f. 6v-r. In the *Risāla fī ʾl-Dhikr* al-Āqḥiṣārī explains that, apart from those actions for which loud *dhikr* is obligated—such as when one utters the testimony of faith, which must be done loudly at least once in a lifetime, when making the call to prayer (*adhān*), the *takbīr*s of the Eid prayer, and a handful of similar instances—the Sunna insists both women and men perform *dhikr* with an inaudible tone (*al-ikhfāʾ*). He cites several verses of the Qur'an and various *ḥadīth*s to support his claim, among them, "And remember your Lord in your soul, with humility and in reverence, without loudness in words, in the morning and evenings; and be not of those who are unheedful" (Q.7.205). He then says, "God has [in this verse] commanded one to perform the *dhikr* and supplication (*duᶜā*) silently; to make these audible is proscribed since the command (*al-amr*) to undertake one action is at once the prohibition (*al-nahy*) of its opposite. The thing which has been prohibited is *ḥarām* and to undertake a *ḥarām* action is a sin (*maᶜṣiya*)", *Risāla fī ʾl-Dhikr*, MS Harput 429, f. 49v.

The two preceding texts—the first of which underlines the excellence of making *dhikr* with the formula, *lā ilāha illa ʾllāh,* and the second acclaiming the internalised or silent method (*dhikr al-khafī*) as the preferred mode—bear identifiable resemblance to the Naqshbandī prescriptions for how *dhikr* should be performed: At the level of practice, the silent *dhikr* was a key marker of the Naqshbandī Order, separating it from virtually all other Sufi brotherhoods. The founding fathers claimed it was inherited from the Prophet Muḥammad's closest companion, Abū Bakr al-Siddīq, who was also proclaimed the spiritual fount of the order. The story is told by Hamid Algar: "The transmission of the *dhikr* took place during the hijra when the Prophet and Abū Bakr were together in the cave: Abu Bakr faced the Prophet, his breast turned towards him, sitting on his heels with his hands placed on his knees and his eyes closed. The Prophet then silently enunciated the form of the dhikr—*lā ilāha illa ʾllāh*—three times, and was followed by Abū Bakr. This transmission of the *dhikr* signified the beginning of the *silsila* that was ultimately to acquire the designation Naqshbandi, and also furnished the archetype for all subsequent initiation into the *silsila*. Initiation is essentially the transmission of the *dhikr*, from the most recent link in the initiatic chain to the new disciple".[22]

Commensurate then, with the Qāḍīzādeli view, the Naqshbandī tradition also held the silent *dhikr* to be more commendable than the audible *dhikr*, with only a small minority in the history of the order considering the silent *dhikr* as the only acceptable form.[23]

Kashf

Al-Āqḥiṣārī expresses deep concerns about charlatans on the mystical path that may, despite their lack of true spiritual attainment, be able to achieve what appear to be the mystical states known of true Sufis. These states are thought to be the routine outcome of sustained periods of *dhikr* and spiritual exercise (*mujāhada*). According to Sufi tradition, sustained *dhikr* leads to the removal of barriers (*ḥijāb*) between the spiritual wayfarer and God, which creates the

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[22] Algar, "The Naqshbandi Order", 129. Le Gall notes that for the Naqshbandīs, silent *dhikr* went beyond simply reciting the formula *lā ilāha illā ʾllāh Muḥammad rasūl Allāh* in the heart in a way that was inaudible. It was meant to be 'an individual, interiorized, and continuous technique that one performed at all times and while engaged in a myriad of activities. Ideally it was to become a "natural disposition" (*malaka*), which even the reciter's heart would cease to sense, so as to become oblivious to anything that was not God, including the very act of remembrance.' D. Le Gall, "Forgotten Naqshbandis and the Culture of Pre-modern Sufi Brotherhoods," *Studia Islamica*, 97 (2003), 87-119: 94.

[23] See Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism,* 116.

conditions for the reception of mystical revelation, known in Sufi parlance as *kashf.*[24] The spiritual aspirant is believed to receive *kashf* in differing degrees of intensity, commensurate with his ascension through the stations of spiritual realisation. However, when spiritual progress is used as an excuse to absolve oneself of having to adhere to the law, alarm bells invariably sound among Sufism's orthodox practitioners. Long before al-Āqḥiṣārī, antinomianism presented a major affront to the more conservative Sufi orders. In al-Āqḥiṣārī's time, it would seem, according to *Majālis al-Abrār,* that antinomianism was especially prevalent amongst the Khalwatīs, a mystical order which al-Āqḥiṣārī specifically singles out in his critique.[25] And so when al-Āqḥiṣārī's tone appears as severe as it is towards people who claim to enjoy mystical revelation without having the requisite training in jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and orthodox creed (*ᶜaqīda*), it is probably the Khalwatīs that he has in mind. The following exemplifies this:

Advancing to higher levels before perfecting the foundations and demarcating the pathways is [mere] satanic haste and egotistic caprice. Such a person's fate is to be debased in both this world (*dunyā*) and the Hereafter, since he is deluded by mental fantasies and satanic illusions which he considers to be saintly miracles (*karāma*), though they are in fact traps which increase him in variegated forms of misguidance […] it is probable that such a person will experience the unveiling of some matters or experience unnatural phenomena (*khāriq al-ᶜāda*) by virtue of his spiritual exercise or the deception of Satan—this sort of thing has been narrated from some of the spiritually trained disbelievers. Thus, he may believe that it is [a sign of] sainthood and a miracle, when in fact it is a trap and self-deceit—anything but sainthood and a true miracle.[26]

To what extent is al-Āqḥiṣārī's view about *kashf* consistent with the Naqshbandī way? Aḥmad al-Sirhindī (d. 1033/1624), al-Āqḥiṣārī's contemporary and well-known founder of the

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[24] Although there are variances across the Sufi order as to the subject of *kashf,* there is broad consensus within them that this is a key mode of acquiring divine knowledge. Annemarie Schimmel says: "[Sufis] all clearly distinguished the *ᶜilm ladunnī,* the "wisdom that is with and from God" and is granted to the gnostic by an act of divine grace, from normal knowledge." A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions in Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 193.

[25] The Turkish Khalwatīs during the 16th and 17th centuries were frequently criticized by the orthodox ᶜulamāʾ, who were often also representatives of the Naqshbandī Order. Their attacks against the Khalwatīs carried significant weight, and as explained by Bradford G. Martin, stemmed from political, doctrinal and cultural antagonism. B.G. Martin, "A Short History of the Khalwati Order of Dervishes," in *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East since 1500,* ed. N.R. Keddie (Berkley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1972), 283. On the antinomian Sufi orders of Ottoman Turkey see A. Karamustafa's *God's Unholy Servants: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Middle Period 1200-1550* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006).

[26] *Majālis al-Abrār,* f. 6v.

Mujaddidī line of Naqshbandī Sufism, serves as a useful comparator. Al-Sirhindī also rejected *kashf* as an independent source of knowledge—for him, the pre-eminent status of the Sharīᶜa must always be protected. As noted by Muhammad Abdul Haq Ansari, al-Sirhindī's view on *kashf* is that it can only act as an interpreter of the Prophetic revelation (*waḥy*) in matters concerning faith: 'Inspiration (*ilhām*) only brings out the non-apparent truths of religion; it is not to add upon its truths. As *ijtihād* reveals rules that are implied (in the Sharīᶜa), similarly, *ilhām* reveals the hidden truths (of faith) which ordinary people are not able to see'. And even in this capacity of interpreter, *kashf* is not infallible—similar to applied legal reasoning (*ijtihād*), *kashf* could be both a source of correct guidance and misguidance. If the guidance that comes to a mystic from *kashf* contradicts the guidance of the theologians of *Ahl al-sunna wa ʾl-jamāᶜa*, it should be rejected as the product of intoxication (*sukr*). Al-Sirhindī says: "The criterion of the validity of mystical ideas (*ᶜulūm ladunniyya*) is that they should agree with the clear ideas of the disciplines of the Sharīᶜa […]; the truth is what the ᶜulamāʾ of the *Ahl al-sunna wa l-jamāᶜa* have established. All else is blasphemy (*zandaqa*), heresy (*ilḥād*), and the result of intoxication (*sukr*) and ecstasy (*ghalabat al-ḥāl*)."[27] The degree of consistency between al-Āqḥiṣārī and al-Sirhindī on the status of *kashf* is unmistakable. Both are willing to accept guidance attained from *kashf*, but only with the caveat that it is aligned with the Sharīᶜa as interpretated by scholar juristsʾ; this appeal to the jurists is of course another well-known feature of Naqshbandī Sufism, in a system where the Sharīᶜa takes its position at the epicenter of all rational and supra-rational activity and experience.

The *Shaykh-Murīd* Relationship

It is clear that in al-Āqḥiṣārī's religious *Weltanschauung* Sufism holds a central place. What is rather more opaque, at least on the basis of the *Majālis,* is what al-Āqḥiṣārī's position is on organised Sufism, specifically when it is configured in the form of a *ṭarīqa*. The crucial question here is, was he affiliated to a specific order? For an answer, we need to look beyond *Majālis al-abrār* and turn to the *Risāla fī ʾl-sulūk*, which proves revelatory. The title of the epistle alone challenges the popular image of the Qāḍīzādelis as anti-Sufis. Here we are confronted with what appears to betray al-Āqḥiṣārī as, firstly, an advocate of formalised,

[27] M.A. Ansari, *Sufism and Shariʿah: A Study of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi's Effort to Reform Sufism* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1986), 72.

ṭarīqa-oriented Sufism, and, secondly, as a scholar who had a predilection for the Naqshbandī order.

The idea that a "true shaykh" is both perfect (*kāmil*) and perfecting (*mukammil*) is a familiar trope in Naqshbandī Sufism.[28] Once such a shaykh is identified, the aspiring wayfarer should not delay in offering him allegiance (*bay^c^a*). The *bay^c^a* sets into motion a relationship which is said to surpass even the bond between parent and child. Naqshbandīs insist that the disciple attunes their heart to the personality of their shaykh, a state known as *rābiṭa*. Whether in the presence of the shaykh or in his absence, the disciple should maintain a constant bond. On this Johan ter Haar notes: "The task of the spiritual guide *vis-a-vis* his novice in the Naqshbandī Order is quite often described as a process of "upbringing" (*tarbiyyat*)."[29] The task of "upbringing" is conjoined with the more traditional role of the shaykh as instructor (*mu^c^allim*), with the distinction that the former role now takes priority and thus sets apart the Naqshbandī shaykh from the role of the shaykh in conventional Sufism. Al-Āqḥiṣārī's position on the *murshid-murīd* relationship is closely aligned with the Naqshbandī approach: he advocates a relationship which demands of the *murīd* that s/he displays complete subservience to the *murshid*. In Ghazālian terms, al-Āqḥiṣārī requires that the *murshid-murīd* relationship be analogous to the corpse (here the *murīd*) in the hands of a person preparing it for burial (here the *murshid*). The following excerpt provides more details on this theme, making clear just how proximate al-Āqḥiṣārī's version of the *murshid-murīd* relationship is to the Naqshbandī Order:

Furthermore, through the course of his [wayfaring], a disciple must have a righteous and perfected shaykh and guide who serves as a representative of the Prophet, God's peace and blessings be upon him, thereby ensuring that the disciple is protected from error, purged of his base traits and bestowed in their place higher virtues. The condition for any shaykh to play the role of representative of the Prophet is that he be a scholar who adheres to the Sharī^c^a, in his words, deeds and beliefs; [he] should himself be following a person of spiritual insight who is connected in an initiatic chain (*silsila*) all the way back to the Prophet. He should excel in the training of his ego (*riyāḍat nafsi-hi*) and should imbibe

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[28] J. ter Haar, "The Importance of the Spiritual Guide in the Naqshbandī Order", in *The Heritage of Sufism*, ed. L. Lewisohn, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 2: 319. In Sufism, the *shaykh* is the spiritual master (plural: *shuyūkh, mashāyikh*). Having himself traversed the mystical path, he knows its traps and dangers, and is therefore essential for the aspiring novice or *murid*, who must place himself totally under his guidance. He thus becomes the novice's spiritual father and 'educator', *al-shaykh al-murabbī*. His closeness to God makes him a saint (*walī*), and provides the basis for his authority. See E. Geoffroy, art. "Shaykh", *EI2*, (last access 29 January 2017).

[29] ter Haar, 'The Importance of the Spiritual Guide in the Naqshbandī Order', 319. For more on the *rābiṭa* in Naqshbandī Sufism, see *Ottoman Puritanism and Its Discontents*, 64-65.

every excellent virtue. Unfortunately, today it is rare to find such a man—he is even more precious than red sulphur (*al-kibrīt al-aḥmar*).[30] Whoever is fortunate enough to find such a shaykh should respect him outwardly and inwardly. As for outward respect, he should not argue with him or protest in his presence about issues, even if he knows [the shaykh] has erred; instead, he should do whatever he is ordered to do, as is within his capacity. He should not ostentatiously perform the supererogatory prayer in his [shaykh's] presence. As for inward respect, it is not to oppose inwardly whatever he has accepted from his shaykh outwardly, so that he does not become a hypocrite. If he is incapable of this, he should abandon the *ṣuḥba* [of his shaykh] until [such a time as] his outward [state] is in harmony with his inward [state]. This is since the condition for receiving Divine emanations (*istifāḍa*) from the Unitary Presence (*ḥaḍra waḥdāniyya*) is to have the heart connected (*rabṭ*) with the shaykh in a way of submission and love. He should believe that this manifestation is what God himself has apportioned for him (*li ʾl ifāḍa ᶜalay-hi*), and that he would not have attained this emanation were it not for his shaykh—though the world might be full of shaykhs. And if the interior (*bāṭin*) of a *murīd* becomes transfixed on another, his interior will not expand sufficiently to experience the Unitary Presence.[31]

As al-Āqḥiṣārī proceeds with his exposition of the *murshid-murīd* relationship, his position appears to move ever more in line with the relationship as it is conceived in Naqshbandī Sufism. He speaks explicitly about the *rābiṭa*, furthermore, there is a description of how the pre-eminent formula for *dhikr*, *lā ilāha illa ʾllāh*, is to be repeated—yet again we are presented with a technique that is characteristic of the Naqshbandīs—finally, there is a discussion on *fanāʾ*, which appears to be a direct appropriation from the Naqshbandī Order:[32]

It is important for the disciple to be focused in one direction (*jiha*), for his orientation towards God is via that direction. That direction is also the spirit of the Messenger of God, prayers and peace be upon him, who is in the world of spirits (*ᶜālam al-arwāḥ*); just as the prayer is not accepted unless it is done towards the Kaᶜba, emanation (*fayḍ*) is not attained from God except by way of following the Prophet and submitting to him, and attaching the heart (*rabṭ al-qalb*) to his prophethood (*nubuwwa*), and the

[30] J. ter Haar cites Muḥammad Pārsā, disciple, second successor and chief ideologue of Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband, who shares the same sentiment as al-Āqḥiṣārī in his *Qudsiyya Kalimāt-i Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband*: "Previously there were many competent guides, but in recent times their number has fallen sharply, to such an extent that they have become an exceptional phenomenon, even more precious than red sulphur". J. ter Haar, "The Importance of the Spiritual Guide in the Naqshbandī Order", 318. It is unlikely that al-Āqḥiṣārī knew Pārsā's work. On the expression "red sulphur" (*kibrīt aḥmar*), see Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 236-237.
[31] *Risāla fī ʾl-Sulūk*, f. 74v.
[32] For the Naqshbandīs, *fanāʾ* is a process of three stages: the first is *fanāʾ fī ʾl-shaykh*, the second, *fanāʾ fī ʾl-rasūl* and the last is *fanāʾ fī Allāh*. These three steps allow the process of annihilation to proceed in a controlled and systematic way. Above all, they ensure that the shaykh is intimately involved in the journeying of the *murīd* along the mystical path, and cement firmly the idea that the goal of the mystical path cannot be achieved without complete obedience to the shaykh. On the stages of *fanā'*, see Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 236-237 and Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, 60.

belief that he is the means (*wasīla*) towards God, not any other Prophet. For although other Prophets were upon truth, no emanation can be attained without connecting the heart to the Messenger of God (i.e. Muḥammad). Accordingly, since the shaykh is a representative of the Messenger of God, it is necessary that [the disciple] orients himself completely towards his shaykh, by way of connecting his heart to him. He should have certainty that emanation cannot be obtained except via his shaykh—despite the existence of other saints who are also guides and guided themselves. He should be sure that his seeking of support from his shaykh is tantamount to seeking support from the Messenger of God, since his shaykh has taken [the path] from his shaykh, who has taken it from his shaykh to his shaykh, all the way back to the Messenger of God [...] Thus the connection of the heart with the shaykh is a major corner-stone of emanation. In fact, it is the ultimate corner-stone, and for this reason, all Shaykhs have greatly emphasised this corner-stone. They have gone so far as to say that the disciple should resemble, in his obedience to his shaykh, the dead body [in its submission] to the one who is tasked with performing its funeral ablution.[33]

The Divine emanation (*fayḍ*) which al-Āqḥiṣārī speaks of here, or the "enabling energy", as it has been described by one scholar of the Naqshbandī tradition,[34] is only achieved via the shaykh, who is thought of as the representative of the Prophet Muḥammad in the lower world (*dunyā*). The Prophet himself stands out among all other Prophets as the perfect receptacle of this *fayḍ*. What makes orienting towards a shaykh all the more important is that it is impossible to orientate oneself directly towards the Divine—man is bound by direction whereas the Divine is not. A shaykh is thus the only means for a disciple to experience *fayḍ* and thus achieve the desired ends of the path. When al-Āqḥiṣārī speaks about the connection of the disciple's heart (*rabṭ al-qalb*) with the shaykh's, there is an echo of the Naqshbandī emphasis on the same, expressed by one of the order's masters in the following manner: "In our path, arriving at the station of perfection is related to a connection (*rābiṭa*) with an exemplary shaykh. The sincere disciple, through his love of the shaykh, is a recipient of divine energy (*fayḍ*) from the interior (*bāṭin*) of the shaykh, and becomes coloured with the colour of the shaykh; [he] has an essential connection to the shaykh [...] this they call annihilation in the shaykh, the beginning of true annihilation [in God]. [Anyone engaged in] *dhikr* without bonding his heart to the master, and without achieving annihilation in the shaykh, will not arrive."[35]

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[33] *Risāla fī' l-Sulūk,* f. 74r.
[34] A. Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Shaykh* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina, 1998), 118.
[35] A quotation of Khwāja Muḥammad Maᶜṣūm (d. 1096/1684), shaykh of the Naqshbandī-Mujaddidīs after Aḥmad Sirhindī, cited in Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet,* 131.

A detailed survey of the *Risāla fī l-sulūk* falls outside the scope of this study. Yet, these passages alone highlight just how central Sufism is in al-Āqḥiṣārī's thought. Whilst there is not enough here to suggest he was a shaykh or disciple of the Naqshbandī path, at the very least the alignment with key aspects of Naqshbandī devotion is clearly identifiable, particularly with regard to the *murshid-murīd* relationship; and though al-Āqḥiṣārī does not explicitly advocate formal initiation into a *ṭarīqa*, there is a strong suggestion that he viewed a systematic approach to the mystical path as an important dimension of the disciple's journeying.

Taymiyyan *Taṣawwuf*

For all the interesting convergences between al-Āqḥiṣārī's approach to Sufism with autochthonous Naqshbandī devotion, neither *Majālis al-Abrār* nor *Risāla fī ʾl-sulūk* should be understood as handbooks of Naqshbandī Sufism, not least because he never mentions the Naqshbandī Order, its key texts or its personalities. Indeed al-Āqḥiṣārī's ambivalence about the precise nature of the spiritual path—insisting on the one hand that every wayfarer (*sālik*) should have a shaykh while on the other nowhere suggesting that a person commit to a specific spiritual order—is only compounded by the fact that he also read and drew at key points from the thought of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya. The extent of this is set out below.

On the *Khalwa*

The first time one is confronted by the mark of Taymiyyan *taṣawwuf* in the work of Aḥmad al-Āqḥiṣārī is in a discussion on *khalwa* (spiritual retreat).[36] In the following text, al-Āqḥiṣārī speaks about the *Aṣḥāb al-khalwa* ("the people of spiritual retreat")[37] and the problems he believes are associated with such practice:

There are some people in our time who enter into retreat (*khalwa*) for three days or more, and who, when they reappear—even if after only [having been in retreat] once or twice—claim that they have attained a state of perfection and have reached the stations of the men [of the spiritual path]. [This is] despite the fact that they engage in actions which contravene the noble Sunna. If their likes are rebuked for what they engage in, they say, 'The proscription of that is but in the knowledge of the outward (*ᶜilm al-ẓāhir*), whereas we possess knowledge of the inward (*ᶜilm al-bāṭin*), therefore such things are

[36] The *khalwa* is pivotal among a number of Sufi orders, with special emphasis placed on it by the Kubrawīs, the Shādhilīs, the Qādirīs and the Khalwatīs. See H. Landolt, art. "Khalwa", *EI2* (last access 29 January 2017).

[37] Al-Āqḥiṣārī's indirect reference to the Khalwatīs as "the People of *khalwa*" is intriguing: possibly it was simply a way to disparage the order; alternatively, the broader description might have meant to include all Sufis who incorporated the *khalwa* into their devotional regimen.

permitted [to us]. Arrival to God, exalted is He, does not occur except when knowledge of the outward is rejected. You all take from the Book (*al-Kitāb*), whereas we, by virtue of the retreat (*khalwa*) and the blessing of the shaykh, arrive to God, the Exalted. Various branches of knowledge are revealed to us without any need on our part to take recourse to the Book, or reading it in the presence of a teacher. If we produce hated deeds, or [a deed] which is prohibited, we are made aware of its proscription in visions. In this way, we come to know of the permissible (*mubāḥ*) and the proscribed (*ḥarām*). As for what you say is proscribed, we have not been made aware of its proscription in visions, thus we know that it is not proscribed.'[38]

Despite the improbable historicity of this conversation, the passage reveals the scorn harbored by al-Āqḥiṣārī for the Khalwatīs, or the "*Aṣḥāb al-khalwa*". While it might appear that he is more interested in the ramifications of the *khalwa*, in particular those visions that could lead to abandoning the Sharīᶜa, rather than the *khalwa* per se, insofar as the *khalwa* has no place within his own vision of the mystical path it is likely that this was a complete rejection of the practice. Certainly, at no point in the *Majālis* or elsewhere in al-Āqḥiṣārī's corpus does there appear to be anything positive about the *khalwa qua* spiritual retreat. It is also clear from this text that al-Āqḥiṣārī has little faith in those who, after having been in *khalwa*, emerge claiming to have attained gnosis and subsequently seek to excuse their own contraventions of the Sharīᶜa. In al-Āqḥiṣārī's epistemology, revealed knowledge—*al-sharīᶜa al-munazzala*—is the ultimate *magisterium*. And though he also accepts the epistemic value of reason, he does so with caveats and only when it is delimited by *kalām*-theology. As far as mystical visions are concerned, they can only corroborate what is in Scripture—they are never an independent epistemic source.

There remains a question about why al-Āqḥiṣārī's opposition to the *Aṣḥāb al-khalwa* is as severe as it is. Was he unaware of the evidence furnished by the advocates of the *khalwa*, namely that it was the practice of all the Prophets, and also continues to exists in sunnaic terms in the form of *iᶜtikāf*, the retreat practiced in the final nights of Ramadan? It is probable that al-Āqḥiṣārī saw *iᶜtikāf* as a separate category, distinct from *khalwa* and also unsuited to being a template for mystical retreat as practiced by Sufis. In any case, far more insidious for him are the resulting mystical visions. The *Majālis* suggests that some practitioners of the *khalwa* treated their mystical visions and inspirations as divine revelation, tantamount to the Qur'an. According to al-Āqḥiṣārī, such people make the following claim: "The thoughts of the heart, a

[38] *Majālis al-Abrār*, f. 4r.

domain protected by God, the Exalted, are infallible." Al-Āqḥiṣārī responds to this claim with the words, 'This is of the greatest tricks of the enemy (i.e. Satan)!'[39]

Much of what al-Āqḥiṣārī says about the types of inspiration which the retreat can induce is taken directly from Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziya's *Ighāthat al-Lahfān,* mainly verbatim, somewhat reorganized and rarely directly cited.[40] He adopts the same tripartite typology of the Ḥanbalī theologian, dividing inspirations into lordly (*ilāhiyya*), satanic (*shayṭāniyya*) and egoistic (*nafsāniyya*). Accordingly, he insists that a person should scrutinise his inspirations in order to decipher whether they are of lordly origin, and therefore to be heeded, or whether they are of satanic or egoistic origin, and therefore to be ignored. At no point is a person protected from inspirations of a satanic or egoistic nature, no matter how advanced on the mystical path they might be, since "the two will never part from him until death; they flow in him like the blood in his veins."[41] For al-Āqḥiṣārī, only a prophet can rely upon inspiration, for it is only a prophet who is blessed with infallibility (*ᶜiṣma*): "The Prophets are middle-men between God, the Exalted, and His creatures insofar as they deliver His commands (*amr*) and prohibitions (*nahy*), His promises (*waᶜd*) and His threats (*waᶜīd*). Apart from them, no one is infallible." [42] He is so adamant about this that, like Ibn al-Qayyim, he says that anyone who believes that he no longer needs to adhere to the religion of the Prophet, citing his mystical visions and inspirations as justification, has committed the greatest act of disbelief (*min aᶜẓam al-nās kufran*). Even when someone is convinced that he has been inspired by the Lord: "He must turn to a scholar who knows the [true] meaning of it; if the meaning is obvious (*ẓāhir*), then it need not be interpreted, only clarified. If, however, it is not obvious (*ẓāhir*), and so requires interpretation, then it should be done in the correct manner."[43]

On Saints and Visiting Shrines

Most, if not all, Sufi orders afford a special position to saints, termed *awliyāʾ*. The origins of the cult of saint veneration are unclear and may have developed as corollary to the sanctified status of the Prophet Muḥammad or perhaps appropriated by Muslims from foreign religious traditions. Whatever the case, the practice soon evolved into a complex of different practices

[39] *Majālis al-Abrār.* f. 5v.
[40] See especially Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ighāthat al-Lahfān fī Maṣāyid al-Shayṭān*,ed Muḥammad 'Afīfī, 2 vols. (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1989), 1: 192-4.
[41] *Majālis al-Abrār,* f. 5v.
[42] *Majālis al-Abrār,* f. 5v.
[43] *Majālis al-Abrār,* f. 5v.

and beliefs. Intercession, miracles, ceremonies at shrines and other forms of veneration became intricately woven into the cult of saints; its popularity soon became a concern of the jurists and theologians, and even at times the state.[44] One aspect of the cult of saints, which stems from the ideas of Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 255/869), and after him Ibn al-ᶜArabī (d. 638/1240), was the idea that saints were able to achieve stations that surpassed even those of the Prophets. With this was associated the concept of *khatm al-wilāya,* the seal of sainthood. Al-Āqḥiṣārī had strong views on this question, as set out in an epistle in which he argued that the Muslims are agreed (*muttafiqūn*) about the excellence of a prophet over the saint and that no weight should be given to heretical claims that suggest otherwise: "Whoever thinks that there are saints who can guide to God without need of [the Prophet], upon him be peace, is a heretic (*mulḥid*) and disbeliever (*kāfir*) […] There is no path to God except by following him, upon him be peace, inwardly (*bāṭinan*) and outwardly (*ẓāhiran*)."[45] He also had very strong views on the visitation of graves, especially the graves of holy people. Birgili was probably the first in Ottoman society to highlight the problem of visiting graves, marshalling arguments from Ibn al-Qayyim in order to support his case. He treats the subject in his *al-Ṭarīqat al-Muḥammadiyya* and the *Risāleh-i Birgivi/Vasiyyet-nāme* [*The Epistle*].[46] Al-Āqḥiṣārī shared Birgili's concern: in *Majālis al-Abrār, Majlis XVII* is devoted to the prohibition of praying near tombs. He also composed an epistle on the subject, *Radd ᶜalā al-Maqābiriyya - A Refutation of the Grave-worshippers*. As with his revivalist comrade, he is explicit about his main source, Ibn al-Qayyim's *Ighātha*, and is particularly emphatic about his adulation for the mediaeval Ḥanbalī in the introduction:

These pages I have taken from *Ighāthat al-Lahfān fī Makāyid al-Shayṭān* of the shaykh, the imām, the most erudite (*ᶜallāma*), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya—may God accept his soul among the souls of those who have returned to their Lord, both pleasing and pleased. I append to this some of what I have discovered in other authoritative books. This is because many people today have made shrines out of some tombs, to which they pray, make sacrificial offerings, and various kinds of acts and statements emanate from them which do not befit the People of Faith (*ahl al-īmān*). I thus wanted to make clear the Sharīᶜa verdict regarding this matter, so that the truth stands clear from falsehood for all who want to correct and purify faith from the machinations of Satan.[47]

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[44] For more on this theme, see M. Schöller, *The Living and the Dead in Islam: Studies in Arabic Epitaphs, Vol. II: Epitaphs in Context* (Wiesbaden, 2004), esp. Chapter 1.
[45] *Risāla fī anna 'l-Nubuwwa Afḍal mina 'l-wilāya,* MS Harput 429, f. 38r-39r.
[46] N. Öztürk, Necati, *Islamic Orthodoxy among the Ottomans in the Seventeenth Century with Special Reference to the Qādī-zāde Movement*, unpublished doctoral thesis (University of Edinburgh, 1981), 366.
[47] *Radd ᶜalā al-Maqābariyya,* MS Harput 429, f. 100r.

Al-Āqḥiṣārī begins with the Prophetic tradition: "May the curse of God be upon those Jews and the Christians who took the graves of their Prophets as places of prostration (*masājid*)."[48] This tradition, found in *Maṣābīḥ al-Sunna,* is then explained as an invocation of the Prophet against those Jews and Christians who had taken to offering prayers at the burial sites of prophets: "[They do so] either because they deem prostration at graves as an act of reverence (*ta*ᶜ*ẓīm*) - although it is in fact an act of open associationism (*shirk jalī*); or they suspect (*ẓannan*) that to face such graves in the moment of prayer is more acceptable to God, the Exalted, insofar as it [constitutes] both the worship of God and reverence for a prophet—this is hidden associationism (*shirk khafī*). It is for this reason that the Prophet, upon him be peace, prohibited his nation from praying at graves, so that they avoid resembling [Jews and Christians], and even when their intentions for doing so are altogether different.'[49] After tracing idolatry back to the era of Noah, al-Āqḥiṣārī then goes on to cite Ibn al-Qayyim's *Ighāthat al-Lahfān* extensively:

Quoting his shaykh [i.e. Ibn Taymiyya], Ibn al-Qayyim in the *Ighātha* says, 'The cause (ᶜ*illa*) for which the Legislator (*Shāri*ᶜ) prohibited taking graves as places of worship is that, many people commit either major associationism (*al-shirk al-akbar*) or something less than it. Indeed associationism (*shirk*) at the grave of a man deemed righteous is dearer to the hearts than associationism [committed] at a tree or a rock. This is why you will find many people at graves standing humbly, out of fear and humility, worshipping reverently (*fī qulūbi-him*), in a manner which they do not [display] even at the houses of God (*buyūt Allāh*), the Exalted, or before dawn (*waqt al-saḥar*). There they hope (*rajā*) for things through the grace (*baraka*) of prayer and supplication which they do not hope for at mosques. In order to terminate the fundamental constituent (*mādda*) of this harm (*mafsada*), the Prophet, upon him be peace, prohibited praying at graves altogether, even if the praying person does not do so to attain blessing from the place, just as he prohibited prayers at the rising and the setting of the sun, and when it reaches its zenith, because these are times at which the Pagans (*mushrikūn*) worship the sun. So, he prohibited his nation from praying at these times even if their intention is not that of the Pagans. If a man prays at a grave because he believes it to be blessed, then [his act] is nothing short of war (ᶜ*ayn al-muḥāraba*) against God and His Messenger, a contravention of His religion (*dīn*) and inventing religion (*ibtidā*ᶜ*dīn*), which God has not given permission for. Indeed, practices of worship are rooted in adherence to the Sunna, not in whims and innovation. Muslims are in agreement about the religion of

[48] *Majālis al-Abrār,* f. 50v.
[49] *Majālis al-Abrār,* f. 50v.

their Prophet, [which states] that praying at graves is forbidden because there is a danger of committing [an act] of associationism (*fitnat ʾl-shirk*) and resemblance to idolatry (*ᶜibādat al-aṣnām*).[50]

For all the proofs furnished by al-Āqḥiṣārī on the question of prayer and supplications at graves, many Ottomans were still not in agreement with the idea of prohibition. It is perhaps for this reason that al-Āqḥiṣārī takes up a very hard-line position, namely that the act of visiting graves can itself become unlawful. His position on this is closely aligned with Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim:

The visitation of graves is of two sorts: the lawful visitation (*ziyāra sharᶜiyya*) and the innovated visitation (*ziyāra bidᶜiyya*). As for the former, which the Prophet himself permitted, the purpose of it is two things: firstly, to serve as a warning (*ittiᶜāẓ*) and a lesson (*iᶜtibār*) for the visitor; and secondly for the benefit of the people buried, who receive the salutations of the visitor and his invocations for them. As for the latter, it is that visit for which prayer is intended [at the graves], or circumambulation of them, kissing them, pressing of cheeks against them, taking soil from them, invoking their occupiers, and seeking their aid (*istighātha*), asking them for victory (*naṣr*), for provision (*rizq*), health, children, for relief from distress and other similar needs. Such was the way of the idolaters, who would ask of their idols. And indeed, this is the source of this innovated, idolatrous adage (*ziyāda bidᶜiyya shirkiyya*). None of it whatsoever is derived legitimately and in accordance with the consensus of the Muslims, since the Messenger of the Lord of the Worlds did nothing of the sort, and neither did his Companions, their successors or the imams of this religion.[51]

This view is also shared by both Birgili and Qāḍīzāde,[52] and would have pitted al-Āqḥiṣārī, along with his revivalist comrades, against the head of the Khalwatīs, Siwāsī Efendi, and others who permitted the visiting of graves to seek the intercession of the dead.[53]

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[50] *Majālis al-Abrār,* f. 50r. For a discussion of the same in Ibn al-Qayyim, see *Ighāthat al-lahfān*, 288-289.

[51] *Majālis al-Abrār*, f. 50r. Ibn Taymiyya's discussion of this is to be found in *Iqtidāʾ al-Sirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*, ed Nāṣir ʻAbd al-Karīm al-ʻAql, 2 vols. (Riyadh: Dār Ishbīliyā, 1998), 279 and passim. The terms *ziyāra sharᶜiyya* and *ziyāra bidᶜiyya* employed by al-Āqḥiṣārī in the text above are of Taymiyyan coinage.

[52] See Birgili's *Radd al-Qabariyya*, Süleymaniye MS Esad Efendi 3780, ff. 54v-55v and Qāḍīzāde's *Irshād al-ᶜUqūl,* f. 173r. Üsṭüwānī Meḥmed Efendi stated his views on visiting the graves in his collection of discourses. In a section on *shirk* he outlines the unlawfulness of praying to the dead. See *Kitāb-i Üsṭüwānī*, f. 176v.

[53] Siwāsī Efendi's views in support of this are found in his *Durar al-ᶜAqāʾid,* Millet, MS ᶜAlī Emīrī, Şer'iyye, 281, f. 58v. There he argues that the visitation of the grave is of benefit to both the visitor and the soul of the deceased. If a righteous person is visiting the soul of a sinner, then the former's supplication could reduce the punishment of the latter. Alternatively, if the deceased led a righteous life—or was a saint—the visitor is set to benefit from emanation (*fayḍ*) and mystical light (*nūr*) by virtue of his contact with the soul of the deceased. He quotes in this regard a *ḥadīth,* "When you have difficulties in your affairs, seek help from the inhabitants of graves." For more on Siwāsī's argument, see Özturk, *Islamic Orthodoxy*, 368-369.

A Unique Vision for the Spiritual Path

That Qāḍizādelis were reading Ibn Taymiyya's and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's critique of Sufism and employing the arguments against their own contemporaries is extraordinary given the intellectual milieu in which this happens, impregnated as it was with Ḥanafī, Māturīdī and Ghazālian thought. This said, their recourse to these medieval scholars is not difficult to understand: Ibn Taymiyya and his erstwhile student had already produced one of the most sophisticated and thorough critiques of Sufism in the history of Islamic thought, attacking the "errors" of heterodox Sufis from theological, philosophical and juridical angles. But more than this, they were visionaries who had constructed, quite ingeniously, a model of mysticism anchored in the Sharīᶜa, the Sunna and the practice of the early Muslims - described quite accurately, in the view of this author, as neo-Sufism[54]- which obviously resonated with the Ottoman puritans and provided the inspiration they needed to advocate their own adapted version of this as they deemed appropriate for the seventeenth century.

As argued by Fazlur Rahman, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim demonstrated the possibility of delivering Sufism from innovative practice whilst maintaining many of the claims of intellectual Sufism and employing the whole range of essential Sufi terminology.[55] Developing on this further, Thomas Michel suggested that true Sufism as understood by Ibn Taymiyya consists in the believer stripping their desire to do other than what God commands and in directing the whole gamut of religious impulses only to God—and it is in this sense that, according to Michel, he and Ibn al-Qayyim can rightly be called the first neo-Sufis. Says Michel:

[54] The term describes a new form of Sufism, thought to have emerged in the 17th century, which was to some extent demysticised and also rooted in the Qur'ān and al-Bukhārī's *al-Jāmiᶜ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. According to Rahman, widely considered to have coined the term, Neo-Sufism was a form of spirituality "largely stripped of its ecstatic and metaphysical character and content, replaced by a content which was nothing else than the postulates of the orthodox." By "postulates of the orthodox", Rahman meant the specific influence of the ᶜulamā', who emphasised upon the 'original moral factor and puritanical self-control' in Sufism, 'especially at the expense of the extravagant features of popular ecstatic Sufism'. Rahman, *Islam*, 2nd Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 206. For more on Neo-Sufism, see J.S. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1971); Nehemia Levtzion and John O. Voll (eds.), *The Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1987); John O. Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1982). It should be noted that in the early 1990s some scholars began to question the postulates of the neo-Sufi hypothesis, arguing that it lacked historiographical evidence to support its distinction between post-18th century *ṭarīqa*s and their classical antecedents. Rex S. O'Fahey and Bernd Radtke have perhaps expended most effort in this direction. Although conceding that there may be some semantic utility in the term for describing certain new organisational phenomena that appeared in various areas of the Muslim world in the 18th and 19th century, they advised extreme caution when using it for the intellectual content of these phenomena. For their views, see RS O'Fahey, 'Neo-Sufism Reconsidered', *Der Islam*, 70 (1993), 52-87.

[55] Rahman, *Islam*, 195.

In taking not merely Sufi terminology but also the concepts of mystical consciousness, by interpreting them in a manner consistent with the Book and Sunna, and by tracing the origins of these concepts to the early shaykhs and the *salaf*, he shows that the striving for God, the need to go beyond the minimum worship of God which is strictly prescribed, and the desire of the believer for a close individual relationship to God in love is all not a novel or peripheral activity in Islam, but finds its roots in the prophetic message itself and the consistent tradition of the community. However, he stresses that this Path to God is not an unregulated spiritual domain where each teacher and student is free to search out individual methods and beliefs, but they must constantly refer everything back to the Book and the Sunna; any departure from that is a deviation into error.[56]

In the reformed Sufism of Birgili, al-Āqḥiṣārī and other Qāḍīzādeli revivalists, this is precisely what was understood by the expression *al-Ṭarīqat al-Muḥammadiyya*—the Muḥammadan Path. From the manual *al-Ṭarīqat al-Muḥammadiyya* of Birgili to *Majālis al-Abrār* of al-Āqḥiṣārī, it is clear that the Qāḍīzādelis also saw the necessity for spirituality, and religious practice generally, to conform to the Sharīᶜa, the Sunna of the Prophet (which for them meant being based strictly upon the Hadith tradition) and the practice of the early Muslims. Above all, they sought to position the personality of the Prophet at the fore of their system, effectively creating a model of authority in which sainthood and religious leadership would be predicated on the imitation of the Prophetic archetype. Not to be confused with the Muḥammadan paradigm of Hākim al-Tirmidhī and those of his school, whose system entailed a substitution of a God-centred mysticism with a prophet-centred one,[57] in the system of al-Āqḥiṣārī and his Qāḍīzādeli comrades attention on the Prophet clearly meant an emphasis upon the Sunna before anything else. Ultimately, they sought a rapprochement between the Sharīᶜa and *ḥaqīqa* (spiritual reality), which they believed could only be achieved through close study of the religious observances of the Prophet as recorded in the sound traditions (*ṣiḥāḥ*). In al-Āqḥiṣārī's case, this explains why he constructed the *Majālis al-Abrār* as a commentary on the *Maṣābīḥ al-Sunna* of the great Shāfiᶜī Hadith master, al-Baghawī. Only from the Prophetic tradition could there follow an authentic model of *imitatio muḥammadi*, and spiritual practices which could not be justified by the texts of the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* were to be condemned as innovations. No existing Sufi order could provide all the resources that such a vision required,

[56] T. Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity: Ibn Taymiyya's al-Jawab al-sahih* (Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1984), 33.
[57] On this see S.H. Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1972).

not even the Naqshbandīs; and so, towards realizing their vision, the Qāḍīzādelis drew inspiration from the thought system of the two Ḥanbalī masters.

While it is significant that al-Āqḥiṣārī and his fellow Qāḍīzādelis drew inspiration for their vision of the mystical path from Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim, it is important to recognize that their vision for the spiritual path was itself a recasting of the system of these two Ḥanbalī giants—so in the system of the Qāḍīzādelis, dialectical theology (*kalām*) maintained the place it enjoyed in other Sharīᶜa-centric Sufic formations. The Qāḍīzādelis were staunch advocates of Māturīdī theology and went to considerable lengths to defend the *kalām* tradition. In this context, al-Āqḥiṣārī is particularly severe towards those who claim mystical revelation without having been trained in *kalām*-theology:

> Whoever busies himself with remembrance (*dhikr*) and spiritual exercises (*riyāḍa*) before learning of the science of *kalām* that degree by which his creed is made to be sound and in accordance with *Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-jamāᶜa*, and by which he can protect himself against the uncertainties of the heretics; and [who learns] of the science of Jurisprudence that amount which causes his actions to be sound and in accordance with the immaculate Law (*al-sharīᶜa al-muṭahhara*); it is probable that there will occur to him what seems to be the unveiling of some things or [that he witnesses] unnatural phenomena (*khāriq al-ᶜāda*) by virtue of his spiritual exercise or the deception of Satan—this sort of thing has been narrated from some of the spiritually trained disbelievers. Thus, he may believe that it is [a sign of] sainthood and a miracle, when in fact it is a trap and self-deceit—anything but sainthood and a true miracle.[58]

Therefore, *kalām* would be the key marker of separation between Qāḍīzādeli Sufism and the Sufism envisaged by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim—the parting of ways, like that described by Khiḍr to Mūsā (Q. 18:78). Whereas for the Ḥanbalī theologians there was always a struggle to conceal contempt for *kalām*-theology, in the system of the Ottoman purists, *kalām* was a discourse they simply would not be prepared to relinquish.[59]

Conclusion

The centrality of Sufism in the thought of Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqhiṣārī is beyond doubt. He is adamant about the necessity for every Muslim to be engaged in personal spiritual struggle; he is clear about the place of mystical exercise and the role it plays for achieving spiritual ascension and unlocking direct knowledge (*maᶜrifa*) of God; he is unyielding about the

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58 *Majālis al-Abrār,* f. 6v.

59 For more about the role of *kalām* in Qāḍīzādeli thought, see M. Sheikh, "Taymiyyan Influences", 19-20.

essential need for a guiding shaykh who might serve as a representative of the Messenger of God, ensuring that a disciple succeeds in their aim while on the spiritual path. For al-Āqḥiṣārī, the shaykh is a medium connecting the disciple to the spiritual world, and above all, a medium connecting the disciple to God.

The centrality of the Naqshbandī Order as a source of inspiration for al-Āqḥiṣārī's approach to the spiritual path has also been brought to light. Al-Āqḥiṣārī has a preference for silent *dhikr,* extols the virtues of *rābiṭa,* is emphatic about the status and role of the shaykh, and highlights the need for a shaykh to have attained spiritual perfection (*kāmil*); all these elements are identity markers of the Naqshbandī path. Yet, for all that the autochthonous order permeated al-Āqḥiṣārī's system, there remains one crucial differentiating feature that makes his system anything but conventional within the Ottoman milieu of his time: al-Āqḥiṣārī read Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, integrating certain aspects of their vision into his own. In their works, he found a sophisticated critique of what they considered heterodox Sufi practices and practitioners which he put to effective use in his own critique of Ottoman Sufism. Beyond this, he adopted their vision for a Sufism anchored in the Sharīᶜa, the Sunna and the understanding of the early Muslims—a project aptly described by Rahman, among others, as Neo-Sufism. Here lies the potentially most important finding of the present study. But the study also emphasizes the need for a re-examination of Ibn Taymiyya's early modern intellectual legacy, which is too often ignored or underestimated outside Wahhābī Islam.

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Whatever you change and add here is to be added and changed in the footnotes as well, thanks.